

Cooperative Learning and Individualized Mentoring (CLAIM) to Build Self-Efficacy, Persistence, and Goal Attainment in Postsecondary African American Students with Disabilities: A Mixed-Methods Approach

Principal Investigator: Dr. Aldo Dutta

CO PI: Dr. Madan Kundu

Abstract

The Department of Rehabilitation and Disability Studies (DRDS) at Southern University, Baton Rouge (SUBR) (Congressional District Six), is requesting for three-year (2015-2018) funding of Project CLAIM. This application is under the category National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR)--Field Initiated Program – Section 21 (CFDA Number: 84.133G-4 Research). The project, being submitted to NIDILRR by a Historically Black College and University (HBCU), addresses the purpose of Field Initiated Projects (FIP) program by developing methods and procedures that maximize the full inclusion and integration into society, employment, independent living, family support, and economic and social self-sufficiency of individuals with severe disabilities, especially those from traditionally underserved groups. Project CLAIM will strive to improve the effectiveness of services authorized under the Act, via the conduct of theory driven research and targeted dissemination activities designed for vocational rehabilitation (VR) clients, their families, communities, practitioners, and employers.

Introducing people with disabilities to the world of work and providing services to enable them to participate in the labor market continue to be a priority for policy makers (Kiernan, Hoff, Freeze, & Mank, 2011). In spite of legislative focus on employment, a large segment of the people with disabilities remains un- or underemployed. However, people with higher levels of education are more likely to be employed than those with less education (Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2014). As per Bieda (2011), there is a significant relationship between unemployment and the availability of workers who have the minimum skills required for hiring consideration. Additionally, the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Post-Secondary Education supports the premise that job placement is as an objective and quantitative indicator of student learning. Persons with disabilities and minorities usually have the same career-related aspirations as those without disabilities (Burchardt, 2004) but significant gaps between their aspirations and outcomes have been repeatedly identified over the past six decades (Stewart et al., 2010). As per Houtenville (2007) and Marshak, Van Wieren, Ferrell, Swiss, and Dugan (2010), only about 13% of those with disabilities possesses a college degree as opposed to 30% individuals without disabilities. As compared to non-minority students with disabilities, those from culturally diverse backgrounds have lower rates of enrollment and degree attainment in postsecondary education (PSE); half the employment rate; and less earned income after a college or university degree (Ewell & Wellman, 2007; U.S. Department of Education, 2005). A few of the reasons for the above discrepancies between persons with and without disabilities are academic dismissal, ineffective pedagogical techniques, lack of assistance on campus, inadequate adaptation to PSE life, negative attitudes of faculty/peers, dearth of natural support, lack of self-determination and self-advocacy skills, inappropriate attributional style (locus of control), and inadequate knowledge of creative problem solving techniques (Marshak et al.,

2010; Moon, Utschig, Todd & Bozzorg, 2011). There is a profusion of literature on the reasons attributed to low college completion rate for students with disabilities (little information on minorities). However, little evidence exists on modalities, techniques, and interventions that are effective in generating successful degree attainment of the target population (Barber, 2012; Madaus, 2006). Researchers identify a severe lack of data on PSE students with disabilities, excruciating need for appropriate evidence based strategies to enhance their performance, and dearth of indicators to document their success leading to employment (Burke, Hedrick, Ouelette, & Thompson, 2008; Moon, Utschig, Todd & Bozzorg, 2011; Sevo, 2012). As per NCD (2004), “the amount of rigorous, evidence-based research on programs that promote positive outcomes for students with disabilities is severely limited” (p. 6). Therefore, Project CLAIM will focus on issues related to employment skills gap from the perspective of educational opportunities, access to multi-disciplinary services, and incorporation of demand side placement strategies in vocational rehabilitation.

The **goal** of Project CLAIM is to conduct a **mixed-methods research** (randomized controlled trial or QUAN and qualitative enquiry or QUAL) study to construct and validate an effective pedagogical framework for promoting self-efficacy, persistence, and goal attainment among AA PSE students with disabilities. The project, designed to improve outcome in the **domain of employment** as specified in **NIDRR's LRP 2013-2017**, will ensure **achievement of goal** by focusing on: **Objective 1:** Offering of cooperative learning and self-directed career planning opportunities. **Objective 2:** Provision of individualized and culturally sensitive mentoring to assist in adjustment to college life. **Objective 3:** Identification of modes of integrating needs of employers and AA PSE students with disabilities so that quality employment-related outcomes can be achieved. The findings will address the **Notice Inviting**

Application (NIA) and NIDRR Long Range Plan (LRP) 2013-2017 by generating better understanding of effective **pedagogical** and **employment** focused interventions designed for transition-age students with disabilities in PSE, especially African Americans. In summary, **Project CLAIM operationalizes the promise of President Obama, Vice President Biden, and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014** to partner colleges and employers for offering high quality real-world education and hands-on training that can lead directly to a job and career in integrated settings.

Project CLAIM will utilize the **two well-known and evidence-based pedagogical techniques** and **two-pronged employment skills development** training to guide AA PSE students with disabilities to academic persistence, goal attainment, and job placement: (a) Interventions 1: Cooperative learning, (b) Intervention 2: Mentoring, (c) Intervention 3a: On-campus employment skills development, and (d) Intervention 3b: Community-based employment skills development. The project will involve a total of 160 (80 experimental and 80 control groups) first- and second-year undergraduate African America PSE students with disabilities registered with SUBR in English and Mathematics classes. The QUAN study will use experimental and control groups (between-group design) with pretest and posttest (repeated measures design) for each of the six research hypotheses. The QUAL study will conduct three follow-up focus groups involving selected students in the experimental group. Descriptive statistics, MANOVA and chi-square test of independence will be used to analyze QUAN data. The Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) methodology will be used to analyze QUAL data. Formative and summative evaluations, as per **NIDRR Logic Model and Goal Attainment Scaling**, will be conducted by an external evaluator and overseen by the Advisory Council. Evaluation data collection and analysis will address **GPRA measures**. The highly qualified and

culturally diverse project staff (Dr. Alo Dutta, PI, 0.33 FTE), possessing a total of 125 years of experience in VR education, research, and service delivery, will devote 1.61 FTE to Project CLAIM. Three quarter time GAs will assist the project staff in data collection, program planning, and report writing. The quality and depth of research, dissemination (annual webcast, publications, presentations), and evaluation will be augmented by the project's long standing partnerships with LRS and selected employers.